

Title: The Fox and The Hen  
Text: Luke 13: 31 - 35  
Date: March 17, 2019

In my Bible, the text for today comes with the title "The Lament over Jerusalem." I wonder if you are familiar enough with the machinations of church and state politics in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago so that you can easily get into the Spirit of lament. The dictionary defines lament as a passionate expression of grief or sorrow.

While ancient Jerusalem seems distant to me, the massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand does not. With 49 Muslims gunned down as they were gathering for Friday evening prayer, it is no surprise that New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern believes this will be remembered as **"one of New Zealand's darkest days."**

I lived in New Zealand for a couple of years, and so I feel a personal point of identification. Not only is the country beautiful geographically, but I found the people there to be particularly genteel. I took Noi there on our honeymoon, and together we fell in love with this peaceful place. There are 2.53 murders by firearm per million there, compared to 32.57 per million here in the US. I used to tell my wife that if I were to retire outside the US, my first choice would be New Zealand. This point of identification makes my lament more personal.

We have the unwelcome reminder that there is no idyllic safe space where sin cannot invade. And the irony is not lost to me that the city where this happened is named Christchurch. In his writings, we have learned that the perpetrator was inspired by Charleston church shooter Dylann Roof, as well as Anders Behring Breivik, the far-right terrorist who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011. This toxic disease of supposed racial superiority and demonization of the other has spread throughout the world looking for clueless victims in which to sink its roots.

A few chapters later in Luke we are reminded that, when Jesus **"drew near and saw [Jerusalem], he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."** (Luke 19:41-42) We weep over the violence in Christchurch, knowing that this is only the most recent in a never ending series of reasons to weep over Christ's world. We weep over the murder of Muslims not just because we sad for a marginalized community, but because we are them, and they are us. We weep. What have we become? Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön reminds us that **"Compassion's truest measure lies not in our service of those on the margins, but in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them."**

Sometimes it is lost boys that cannot see what is hidden from their eyes, and sometimes it is heads of state. Jesus was not above calling out such as these when takes a jab at Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. After being warned that Herod wanted to kill him, he replied, **"Go and tell that fox for me . . ."** (Luke 13:32) In Hellenistic thought, the fox is regarded as clever and sly, but also as unprincipled. The Old Testament associates the fox with destruction (Song 2:15; Ezek. 13:4).

In time Jesus would face a trial before Herod, who has been wanting to meet this Jesus because he hoped Jesus would **"perform some sign"** (23:8). This Herod has entirely missed the purpose and meaning of Jesus' healings and signs. They are not a show for the empire but an embodied rebuke of its arrogant nature. Jesus' words reflect the disdain he held for Antipas, and Jesus does not cower before him. Jesus dismissed Antipas as powerless to prevent him from carrying out his mission. Aware of his manipulations, Jesus takes a verbal jab at Herod Antipas, yet never a physical jab. Jesus is consistently non-violent. Yet it's a thumb in the eye of the same

kinds of imperial power that will try to end Jesus' life. It's not just bravery, but confidence in God's promises.

Walter Brueggemann writes, **"The gospel reading portrays Jesus in sharp contradiction to the dominant ordering of Herod and Rome. Jesus heals and casts out demons, whereas the dominant order of Herod is itself wounding and demonic. In his grief over the dominant order of Jerusalem, Jesus anticipates a future that will be ordered in healthy, messianic ways. The theme for the day is contradiction and alternative."**

What is the alternative? What is in the heart of Jesus when viewing Jerusalem? What is in the heart of Jesus when viewing Christchurch? It is a consistent lament. Jesus speaks in tones of abject disappointment and utter heartbreak at the refusal of people to hear and heed the summons of God to gather and come home. Jesus says, **"How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"** (Luke 13:34) Of all the images of the eternal Christ, please don't miss the fact that this is a decidedly feminine image. This is a decidedly vulnerable image.

Jesus says, **"How often have I desired to gather your children together."** *Desired.* That's a strong word. And it's a rare word in the Gospel of Luke, appearing only one other time. *I desire.* This phrase is pointing us to something significant about Jesus' character. Jesus yearns deeply to gather us. With great feeling, great longing, Jesus seeks to gather us together, to bring us close, hold us, shelter us, keep us. It is a desire for an intimate relation with us.

I'm not sure we very often think of God as desiring us, longing for us. We are more likely to see God as judging us or correcting us or punishing us or testing us or condemning us. Or maybe we see God as distant and disinterested. Up there, out there, far away from where we live. But this text shows that, in Jesus, God is close and God is desiring us, as if there is something in the very nature of God that is completed in us, something in God that is fulfilled by being in relationship with us.

Maybe God yearns to show us who we truly are, how beautifully we've been made, how deep is our capacity for goodness and blessing. Maybe God's desire is to uncover for us the love that is at the core of our being, which we tend to ignore even as we look and struggle for affirmation elsewhere. Maybe God longs for us to behold our true selves, intrinsically connected to the God whose image we bear. Maybe God longs for us to truly see that Muslims and Hindus and pagans are not "other," for we are all being gathered under same wings.

The recent horror in Christchurch reminds us that the fox is in the henhouse, but our text today also reminds us that evil will not have the last word. The time will come when we will all be gathered together under the wings of our Mothering God. And the same text concludes with a call for us to find our prophetic voice, and proclaim the Kin-dom that God envisions: **"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."**

Amen.

As we prepare to now to be gathered around this table, allow me to read a prayer written by Steve Garnass-Holmes, inspired by our text today.

### **Gather me**

Gather me, Mother Christ.  
I am your wayward child,  
impetuous and free,  
defiantly lonesome,

wholly at risk without you.  
Never mind my rebelliousness,  
my fear of your fierce adoration,  
how I disbelieve  
how deeply I need your love  
and how deeply you give it.  
Gather me in, Mother Christ,  
with all your little ones,  
all of them.  
Embrace me, hold me  
long and gentle,  
for I am tired and afraid  
and will run no more.  
I am willing.  
Gather me in.

Luke 13: 31 – 35 **The Lament over Jerusalem**

“At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’” Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”